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## THE PRACTICAL BEARING OF HIGH-SCHOOL LATIN<sup>1</sup>

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The subject of this brief paper has been suggested to me by an officer of the Association. As he writes: "Our enemies must be shown that Latin has a more practical bearing than their philistine minds are aware of." It is a case of taking the bull by the horns, for if there is one charge often laid at our doors, one criticism we Latin teachers are too ready to admit, it is that the study of Latin is unpractical.

Of course, much depends on what is meant by the terms "practical" and "unpractical." I have heard some people argue that no studies are practical that are not directly connected with production or manufacture of some sort. A university graduate, whose principal study at college was economics, once told me that his undergraduate course had been thoroughly unpractical, and now that he had become an accountant he found that his four years at college had been virtually wasted. Another young man, an engineer, told me that there was too much theory about college engineering, that his technical knowledge was gained chiefly in the field, and that he regretted having spent so much time in a scientific school.

When one hears complaints of this sort, originating evidently in a narrow and foolish conception of what is practical and useful, he is less likely to be disturbed by the unreasonable ranting of those who condemn various studies because they fail to see their bearing on practical life. Some months ago, when I paid a visit to the south of the state, I picked up on the train a local paper, from which I was much interested to learn that the trustees of a certain school section were gravely discussing the proposal to

<sup>1</sup> A paper read before the California High-School Teachers' Association at Berkeley, California, July 1, 1914.

banish from the high-school curriculum such "unpractical" subjects as advanced mathematics, higher history, and Latin, in favor of the really "practical" subjects, agriculture, horticulture, and poultry-breeding.

Now this proposal not only illustrates the weakness of the logic of many who condemn good old subjects in the school curriculum, but also indicates the danger to which citizens are exposed when the educational interests of their children are controlled by narrow-minded, short-sighted people, who secure the reins of authority. Everybody (at least in a rural community) knows that poultry-breeding is a practical subject; but it is not everybody who would admit that algebra, trigonometry, and the history of the race are also practical. It is commonly supposed, I imagine, that some subjects were invented merely as tools for school-teachers, but that, so far as practical benefits go, one might as well spend his time in solving Chinese puzzles as in working out algebraic problems, or in tracing the development of civilization in ancient, mediaeval, or even modern times. With people of such extreme views—rather, I should say, of such limited vision—it is foolish to argue. One must have faith that in the general diffusion of enlightenment they will come to see more clearly or that a merciful Providence will somehow override their mistaken efforts to block the wheels of intellectual progress.

But, after all, most people are reasonable and open to conviction. Can we not show honest and intelligent critics that our subject, far from being unpractical, is extremely practical, and worthy of being accorded an honorable and prominent position in the school curriculum? I think we can.

What makes a school subject practical? Is it simply its direct utility in gaining a man or woman a livelihood? If one boy is to be a shoemaker, a second a plumber, and a third a farmer, would it be the most practical schooling for these boys if they confine their attention to shoes, soldering, and soils respectively? Will not a boy become a better shoemaker, or plumber, or farmer if his general intelligence is increased? Of course he will, and, more than that, he will become a better citizen and a better man. Those school subjects, then, we shall call practical which increase

the mental and intellectual efficiency of boys or girls, regardless of the particular trade, or business, or profession they may enter.

Everybody will, I suppose, admit that almost every conceivable subject of study, if pursued with seriousness, will improve the mind and promote general intelligence. The question is, what subjects are best fitted to secure the best results for the greatest number? Mental acuteness, sound judgment, clear discernment, analytic and synthetic power, good taste, logical and lucid expression can all be cultivated and should be developed by our high-school training.

Now of all the practical benefits that we can confer upon our young people in their education, there is nothing that will contribute more directly to real and conspicuous success in life than the power of logical and lucid expression. Whatever field of activity we enter, here is a crying need, and here is an opportunity to satisfy that need. Everybody who is to be anybody must at various times and in various places express himself, and on the manner and effectiveness of that self-expression will, in various degrees, depend one's failure or success in the little or big things of life. The wording of a letter, the preparation of a report, the utterance of an opinion, the delivery of a speech, the composition of an essay, the framing of a statute, the writing of a book—from these and other forms of expression, of one kind or another, we can never escape, and one of the main aims of a practical education must be the development of this power of expression.

Herein lies the reason why it is so important to foster and direct the linguistic sense. Though all human beings—unless they are dumb, and therefore abnormal—have the power of speech, yet the range of a savage's language, strictly in harmony with his narrow range of ideas, is, we know, very small, while that of highly civilized peoples is comparatively very wide. The same principle applies to individuals. As one's intelligence increases, one's mental outlook is widened, and there is a consequent demand for increased linguistic power. Now a mere vocabulary does not take us very far in the acquisition of language. One may memorize all the words in a dictionary and yet have practically no command over the language as a whole. This accomplishment comes

from the recognition, not merely of detached notions, as labeled by individual words, but of more complete ideas, as expressed in phrase, clause, sentence, or paragraph. Thus the color and connotation of words, their relations to one another, their connection and interdependence, their larger groupings, their logical and artistic arrangement are all of prime importance. It may be said with confidence that a knowledge of language-structure is absolutely essential for all who are to rise above the lower levels of our common social life.

How then are we to develop this linguistic sense and nurture this linguistic power? There are, to be sure, various agencies, and no one is alone sufficient. For the English-speaking student, the chief training will always come from the vernacular itself, and no sensible person will depreciate the efforts constantly made to improve the teaching of English language and literature. But the most effective means of developing this power is undoubtedly to be found in the use of a foreign tongue; which will force us to compare and contrast expressions, to analyze and combine words and sentences, to notice and reflect upon speech and its peculiarities—in a word, to foster and upbuild within us the linguistic sense.

But what foreign tongue or tongues must we select for our purpose? Any one of them would serve as a basis of comparison, and would therefore be of undoubted use. An English-speaking person, in studying Chinese, would certainly enlarge his linguistic sense, and the study of Chinese or any other language, under certain circumstances, is not to be despised. But Chinese has so few points of contact with English that, if our chief aim in the selection of a foreign language is to help in the mastery of English, we are not likely to seek that language in China.

Thus our choice becomes comparatively limited. We want languages more or less closely related to English, and if we can find such as are directly useful on their own account as well, they are the ones to win our approval. Hence it is that we choose French or Spanish or German. But the chief objection to these languages is this—that while they may be useful to us in themselves, they do not help us very much in the acquisition of our

own language, English, and that is really what we are chiefly concerned with. Of these three languages, French is the one that, so far as vocabulary goes, stands nearest to English, while German is most closely akin to the Saxon foundation of our speech. But neither French nor German can compare with Latin in the fulness and extent of their vital relation to English. Latin, it has been well said, is "the muscular part" of English, the largest element in "the meat and tissue" that clothe the Saxon skeleton of our language. This is the impregnable fact upon which rests the practical value of the study of Latin.

But another fact lends peculiar value to Latin in a comparison with modern languages. Modern modes of expression, like modern modes of thought, are comparatively much alike among the various nations of Europe, and now that we have accomplished so much toward annihilating the effect of differences of space and time, the modern languages tend to become more and more assimilated in range of thought and style of expression. They are, at any rate, contemporaries, and their literatures deal mainly with the same subjects and embrace the same general conceptions and ideas.

But with Latin it is very different. Not only are we carried by it into another world, where men had a far different social, as well as physical, environment, but we come through it into close relations with a language whose structure and usages are vastly different from those of modern tongues. Thus our basis of comparison is enlarged, and the mental processes involved in passing from one language to the other are more complex and difficult. Above all, the very differences which exist between the languages help immeasurably in that development of the linguistic sense which, I believe, should always be one of the chief aims of a general education. This cannot be achieved to anything like the same extent in French, German, or Spanish, and therefore, in this respect, I maintain that Latin is the most practical study.

Moreover, Latin is a language which, in its English garb, one uses every day of his life, while French or German or Spanish, unless one is put into peculiar circumstances, at special times and places, need never be used. Here is a fact which, in these days of

so-called "democratic education," ought not to be overlooked. Training in Latin is a training suitable for all in a common language, but training in French, German, or Spanish is a special training for special ends. Because Spanish is a practical subject for the one boy out of a hundred, who is to go as an engineer into Central America, it does not follow that it is a practical subject for the ninety and nine who will never need any Spanish. And what I say about Spanish is true also of French and German, though not of course to the same extent. Of the many who study these languages at school, how many make any serious use of them in later life?

I have hinted at the comparative difficulty of Latin. This adds to its value as a school study. The trouble with much of our present-day education is its weakness, its flabbiness, its love of easy and comfortable methods. Only a fortnight ago, Judge Crothers of San Francisco severely arraigned our whole educational system on this very score. "Shallowness and superficiality," he said, "are our great failings in this country. Our schools—public and high—and the university, too, are turning out their products unable to perform the simplest everyday calculations, and unable to write legibly." And so it is that too often, as Helen Dare remarks, in commenting on the judge's speech, "the American business man discovers that his American stenographer (a 'high-school graduate' among other qualifications) can't spell or punctuate or establish an agreement between verbs and nouns." In fact, as she adds, "we smatter from the kindergarten to the crematory" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, June 16 and 17, 1914).

It may be interesting, in this connection, to see what results have recently been secured by Mr. A. I. Dotey of New York, in "An Investigation of Scholarship Records of High School Pupils" (published in the *Official Bulletin of the High-School Teacher's Association of New York City*, No. 44, May 2, 1914). The study was made in the DeWitt Clinton High School (for boys), and one purpose was to determine the place in general scholarship held by the foreign-language groups, viz., the Latin, German, and French groups respectively. The results are based on an extremely careful survey of statistics. It is found, (1) that the elementary-school

records show that at the outset of the school course the Latin group is 1 per cent better than the French and 2 per cent better than the German; (2) that during the first term the Latin group not only maintained its lead in every subject, but greatly increased it in every subject except mathematics; (3) that during the second term the Latin group did better work in every subject than it did the first term, but that the German and French groups did poorer work in every subject except biology; (4) that the relative gain of the Latin group was greater than that of the German in every subject, and than that of the French group in every subject except biology. The relative gain of the French group was greater than that of German in every subject except mathematics.

This interesting report takes note of the fact that the best pupils from the elementary schools elect Latin on entering high school, this meaning, generally, "that the Latin group is composed of pupils who possess ambition and determination in a high degree; who have learned to cope with difficulties and to face responsibilities"; but the report also shows very clearly how superior is the progress made later by the Latin group "after all the pupils have become adjusted to their new environment."

The evidence here submitted is in harmony with the almost universal experience of disinterested teachers and professors throughout the country. One of the latest manifestations of this belief in the efficacy of Latin as a secondary-school study is furnished by the University of Rochester, which has hitherto made it practically impossible for a student of Latin to enter the engineering course, but which now recommends that the five language units required for the engineering course consist of three years of Latin and two of Greek. Similarly, the University of Michigan has just made a change, by expressing a preference for the full classical curriculum as a preparation for the engineering course, Dean Cooley explaining his views as follows: "The very best engineering graduates have been classically trained men. We want all of them we can get. There seems to be a general impression that the so-called vocational studies, those apparently connected directly with the future work of the student, are of first importance for engineering; but we prefer as students of engineer-



ing broad-gauged men whose horizon has been extended and developed by a study of the humanities.

"On the whole, no course of preparation has been developed equal in this respect to the study of Latin and Greek. I expect to see in the next few years a strong reaction in their favor. We want, I repeat, all the men we can get with just that training."

This generally admitted superiority of classical studies is commonly attributed to the broadening influence of the culture involved. While I believe thoroughly in their power in this respect I am convinced that this influence (especially as regards secondary studies) is too subtle and intangible to be carefully estimated. Arguing, however, from the lower plane alone, I make bold to assert the extremely practical value of Latin, because it is so vitally connected with the instrument which must be used in all studies alike, viz., our language.

One piece of evidence that I can furnish, as to the practical value of Latin, will be appreciated, I am sure, by those who would prefer specific facts to plausible generalities. Professor Nathan Abbott, the distinguished Yale scholar, who established the Stanford Law School, used to tell his prospective students that the most practical subject they could take in preparation for their life-work was Latin. Legal study and legal practice, he would argue, are largely a matter of verbal interpretation. "Where," he would ask, "can you get a finer training for this sort of thing than in Latin, where every sentence is a lesson in logic, and where you have constant exercise in unfolding the intricacies of syntactical puzzles?"

Now the training to which Professor Abbott would have his law students submit themselves is a training which would be a practical preparation for any department of knowledge and any line of business or professional life. Perspicuity of language and clarity of thought (the two must always go together) are important qualities which all people should cultivate, and those studies which human experience has shown to be excellent means of cultivating such qualities are rightly regarded as eminently practical. Thus we are not surprised at the striking testimony borne to the value of classical studies "as a training for men of affairs" by Hon.

John W. Foster, ex-Secretary of State at Washington. "Every man at the bar or in public life who was made familiar with the Greek and Latin languages in his early education knows how valuable that study has been to him in his professional career—not on account of the technical knowledge acquired, for that will pass from his memory unless preserved by constant reference to it—but because of the discipline which the study gave to his youthful mind in its formative state. The mere routine labor of the translation of Greek and Latin authors into one's vernacular, the effort to ascertain their exact meaning, and the choice of the words which correctly express that meaning, constitute a mental training which will be invaluable to the future lawyer or public man."<sup>1</sup>

While thus emphasizing the lower and distinctly practical value of Latin study, I would not have you lose sight of its higher, more cultural value. It is not uncommon to regard cultural studies as merely ornamental and decidedly unpractical, but the longer I live the more am I convinced that most culture studies have a distinctly practical importance, though it may not always be easy to measure it. If you look about at the various lines of business or professional life, how often will you find that the men who forge ahead of their fellows and are most successful are not the men who have been wholly engrossed in the work before them, not the men of limited training and narrow outlook, but the men who have cultivated their imagination, who have a broad outlook on life, and who can see beyond the limits of their special field? Many of life's failures are due to narrowness of mind and lack of vision.

From this point of view we may argue in favor of the practicality of culture studies, and, in this respect, also, we claim that school Latin is eminently practical. For just as the study of the language develops the important linguistic sense, so the subject-matter develops the historic sense, without which nobody can be truly cultivated. I am a firm believer in the value of historical study. It illuminates and broadens the mind; it gives intellectual

<sup>1</sup> *Latin and Greek in American Education*, edited by Francis W. Kelsey (Macmillan, 1911), p. 221.

perspective; it widens our knowledge of life and man; it makes one more capable of facing the various problems and difficulties of personal, social, and political life.

Now in studying such authors as Caesar or Cicero one must attempt to visualize and reconstruct the conditions, environment, daily life, and civilization of a great people, at a time far removed from the present. "There is," says Professor Ridgeway,<sup>1</sup> "no more salutary mental exercise than the attempt to project oneself in intelligence and sympathy into another and a distant age. The more distant and dissimilar from our own, the greater the gain." Today, in connection with historical study, we hear a great deal about handling original materials. Well, the boys or girls who work over a book of Caesar's *Commentaries*, or a speech of Cicero's, are handling remarkable and original historic documents. They are, in fact, engaged in historical study of the very highest order, and well is it for them if they have a teacher who realizes his great opportunity, and who tries to foster in them that most excellent virtue, the historic sense, the prime factor in true culture.

But it is not only the linguistic sense and the historic sense that your young Latin student is cultivating. There is this crowning merit in his Latin studies, that not only is he constantly reflecting upon the forms, meanings, and relations of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences; not only is he pondering upon the significance and character of original historical material, but in addition he is feeding his mind upon literary models of a lofty type, and building up an excellent taste, a sense of order and proportion, and an instinct for the seemly and beautiful in prose and poetry—in a word, the *literary* sense. Here, again, the results may not be easily recognized, and even if they are, it may be objected that they are not sufficiently practical. But who can doubt that a boy who concentrates his attention upon the simple, concise narrative of Caesar, upon the rich, polished, and brilliant oratory of Cicero, and upon the majestic thought and sonorous music of the poetry of Virgil will not acquire some sense of form, some feeling for style, some idea of literary standards? These are the intangible qualities which our teachers of English composition

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in the *London Times, Educational Supplement*, June 2, 1914 (p. 99).

are so often powerless to impart, but which seldom fail to be realized by those who submit to the discipline of a classical curriculum.

And have these qualities no practical value? What is the one common cry that today goes up from the various scientific, technical, and non-literary departments of our great schools and colleges? It is the lament over the prevailing inability of students to speak or write good English, and the failure by present methods to secure any improvement in the situation. Is it not an obvious truth that in our colleges the average level of literary power is far inferior to that which prevailed one or two generations ago, and this in face of the fact that the methods of teaching English literature and English composition have vastly improved in the interval?

The reason for this failure lies simply in the fact that under the old classical régime this literary sense and power came to students even though unsought, a kind of sanctifying grace, the natural result of the discipline, however defective, which they underwent, not an artificial product, which nowadays the teacher must consciously and systematically labor to secure.

Today the language of the very classroom has degenerated. Street slang, often so convenient an ally of poverty of thought, is tolerated within our walls, and we have even heard its use on the part of the teacher scandalously championed by a so-called "professor of education," who thus sadly dishonors the profession to which he belongs.

No, there is ample evidence that with the dropping of the classics we lose many solid practical advantages which concern both the individual and society at large, while there flourish in our midst, like wild weeds, such evils as ignorance of and contempt for good taste, loose and slovenly speech, feebleness and coarseness of expression, carelessness of composition, and ineffectiveness of presentation—the last defect being one that often robs success of the crown it otherwise deserves.

We educators are today suffering, and suffering severely, because of our foolish policy of holding our ears to the ground in an effort to learn what the man in the street deems practical, forgetting that as "the things that are not seen are eternal," so the

most truly practical things may be those that the man in the street, with his unaided vision, cannot see.

This truth has been well exemplified by a very recent writer, Dr. T. G. Tucker, who in his *Platform Monologues*, just published in Melbourne, Australia, in speaking of the value of literature, meets the possible objection that this is a *practical* age. But "all ages," replies Dr. Tucker, "are practical. The Greeks and the Romans were practical, and they asked for a practical application of literature to life." So as to the practical import of the poets he has this to say: "The supreme poets are no dainty or fragile sentimentalists; in reality they are the very flower of human penetration. . . . These great writers are supreme, not for their versification, however magnificent, but because that utterance of theirs is the voice of the seer, the voice of a marvelous insight into vital truths. . . . There is about them nothing incomprehensibly transcendental, nothing 'unpractical,' nothing aloof from the life we live—if we live it fully—but wholly the contrary."